

Measles and Rubella Elimination in India- From Setbacks to Success by 2030

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Measles, a highly contagious virus, causes severe complications like pneumonia, encephalitis, even death, with India bearing a massive burden. WHO estimates, in 2020, measles caused an estimated 98,000 deaths globally, with India accounting for nearly 20% of them (1). Rubella, when contracted during pregnancy, leads to devastating Congenital Rubella Syndrome (CRS) in newborns. Both diseases strain healthcare systems, increasing costs and diverting resources from other crucial areas of development. Additionally, lost productivity due to illness and disability adds to the economic burden. The WHO SEAR adopted the goal of measles and rubella elimination by 2023. (Revised from 2019 to 2023). Of the 11 countries in the region, 3 countries (Bhutan, Korea, Timor-Leste) have eliminated Measles and only 2 eliminated both (Maldives & Sri Lanka). India's ambitious goal of eliminating measles and rubella by 2023 fell short due to various factors, leaving us with a crucial public health challenge. While significant progress has been made, achieving this target requires introspection and renewed efforts. Understanding the factors that hampered our progress is essential to charting a successful course for the future.

Factors which contributed to the shortfall:

- COVID-19 disruptions: Pandemic disruptions to routine immunization significantly impacted vaccination coverage, especially for the second dose of the measles-rubella vaccine. (2) According to CDC, MCV1 coverage dropped from 88% in 2019 to 72% in 2021. MCV2 coverage fell from 71% in 2019 to 50% in 2021.
- Unequal access and hesitancy: Reaching geographically remote areas and addressing vaccine hesitancy remained persistent challenges. (3)
- Surveillance limitations: Ensuring sensitive, timely case detection and reporting proved difficult.
- Inadequate infrastructure in remote areas and logistical hurdles in vaccine delivery hampered outreach efforts [4].

Strategy to achieve MR elimination in India by 2030:

Moving forward, a multi-pronged approach is necessary to achieve measles and rubella elimination. The Measles and Rubella Strategic Framework 2021-2030 envisions "A world free from measles and rubella". The goal for the 2021-2030 period is to "achieve and sustain the regional measles and rubella elimination goals".

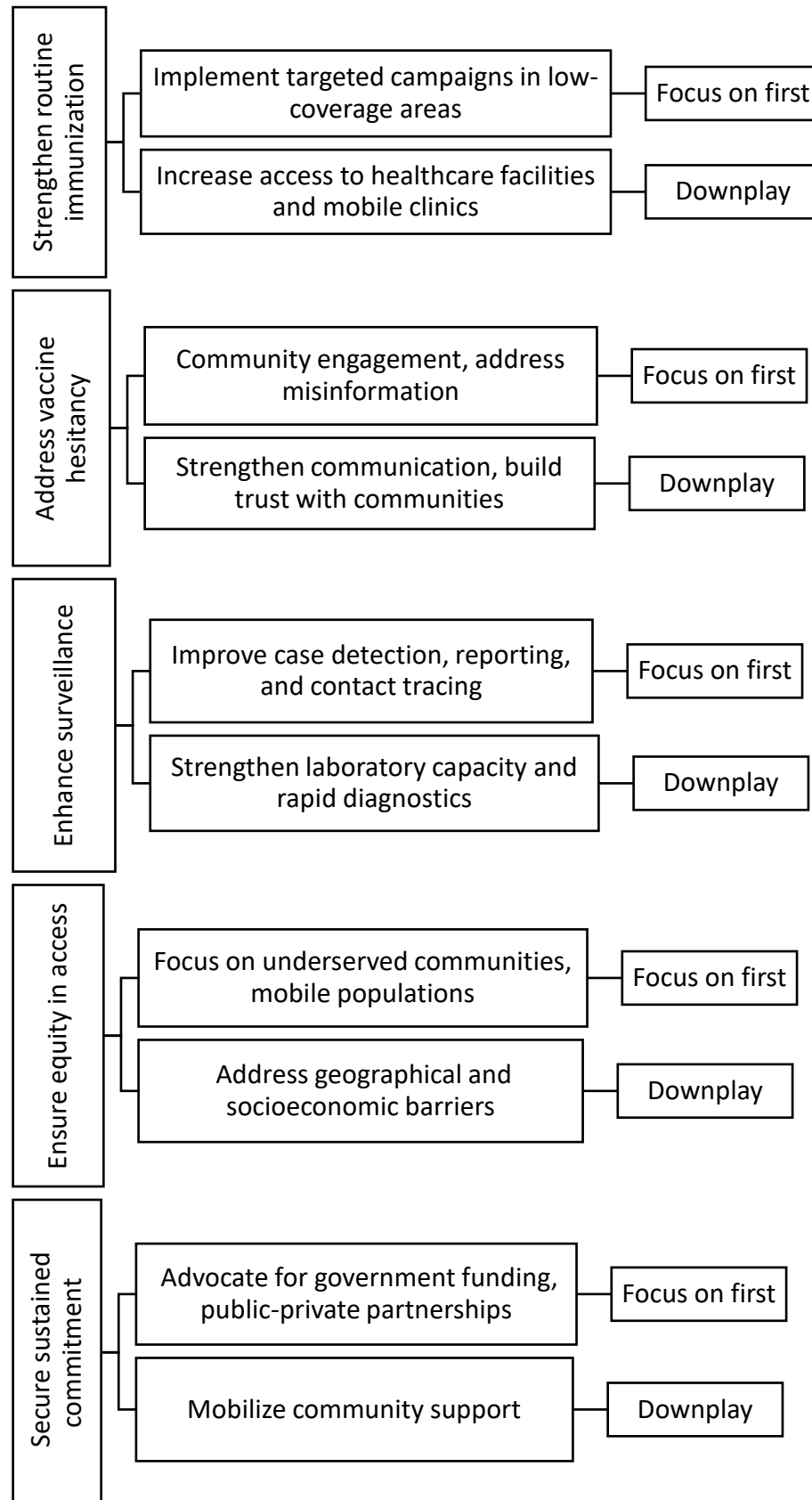


Figure 1: Steps to be taken to achieve MR Elimination in India by 2030.

Boosting immunity in the community by enhancing the availability, acceptability, accessibility, and adaptability of Health force to growing needs of vaccines, Heightened surveillance through Sensitisation of front-line workers, rapid response to outbreaks and backing up the Government/non-governmental aid through focussed policies are the need of the hour for working towards elimination of Measles and Rubella, as shown in the figure 1.

Other areas to concentrate:

- Invest in healthcare workforce (Train and deploy additional healthcare workers, particularly in remote areas), Build trust, address concerns within community leaders and organizations to effectively administer vaccines and address vaccine hesitancy.
- Leverage technology: Utilize mobile health platforms and targeted messaging to disseminate accurate information and improve vaccine awareness [5].
- Strengthen cold chain infrastructure: Ensure proper vaccine storage and transportation, particularly in remote areas, to maintain vaccine potency [6].

In conclusion, achieving measles and rubella elimination in India requires a renewed commitment and a multi-pronged strategy. By addressing the factors that hampered our previous efforts, investing in our healthcare system, and fostering community engagement, we can ensure a healthier future for our children and achieve the goal of eliminating these preventable diseases.

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